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DE RUEHSQ #0364 1561502  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 041502Z JUN 08  
FM AMEMBASSY SKOPJE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7403  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE 0333  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC  
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UNCLAS SKOPJE 000364

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/SCE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: OPPOSITION LEADER STEPS DOWN FOLLOWING  
ELECTORAL DEFEAT

REF: SKOPJE 356

¶1. (SBU) Following her party's defeat in the June 1 early parliamentary elections (reftel), Radmila Sekerinska, President of the largest opposition party, the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), stepped down on June 3. Sekerinska conceded ruling party VMRO's landslide victory, but noted that her party had managed to narrow the predicted 3:1 lead of her political opponents to a 2:1 lead that secured 28 (out of 120) MP seats for her coalition. Referring to SDSM's "established principle" of holding its leaders solely accountable for election defeats, Sekerinska said her decision was final and could not be reversed by SDSM's Executive Committee.

COMMENT

¶2. (SBU) A former Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration and a rising SDSM star, Sekerinska will remain an important player on the political scene. Her close ties with President Crvenkovski will help keep her in the higher SDSM echelons of power. With no clear candidate to take her position, a number of SDSM insiders' names have started circulating as potential SDSM presidents: Igor Ivanovski (SDSM VP, MP, and a Crvenkovski confidante); Jani Makraduli (SDSM VP and SDSM Parliamentary Whip), Zoran Zaev (SDSM VP and the successful mayor of the southeastern city of Strumica); and Blagoj Handziski (Macedonia's Ambassador to Athens and a former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defense.)  
Milovanovic